

**House Bill 820- Child Abuse and Neglect - Training**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Testimony of Joyce Lombardi, Esq., Director of Government Relations and Legal Services**  
**Baltimore Child Abuse Center**  
**SUPPORT**  
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Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Maryland's first accredited children's advocacy center, supports House Bill 820. The bill would require health occupation boards to post and circulate a list of recommended courses on the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect.

As Maryland's oldest accredited children's advocacy center, BCAC has provided services to over 40,000 children and their families, most of them children reporting that they have been victims of child sexual abuse. Since its inception over 30 years ago, BCAC has trained over 25,000 professionals in how to identify, prevent and report child abuse. Sixty percent of all child abuse reports come from professionals who work with children.

Modeled on Maryland's cultural competency law, the bill is meant to provide generic training on child abuse identification and reporting, such as a free online course. With support from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, BCAC developed a free course at <https://www.reportabusemd.com/>.



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The bill is meant to be a **floor, not a ceiling**. Boards may develop more tailored offerings or tie them to continuing education. The Board of Dental Examiners and the Board of Residential Facilities, e.g., both already require training on child abuse.

Professionals such as health and mental health practitioners have a legal duty to report suspected child abuse, yet there is no statewide training requirement for many. (A new law now requires school personnel to be trained on identifying and reporting child abuse and sexual misconduct.) Lack of training is cited by 31 to 41% of professionals who failed to report abuse.<sup>1</sup> Without training, physicians often miss opportunities for early identification and intervention of child abuse, especially infants and toddlers.<sup>2</sup> BCAC has found that, with training, reporters' knowledge improves from 33 to 46%.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, at least 14 states mandate training for various professionals on identifying, reporting, and responding to child abuse and neglect, thus aligning with mandatory reporting training requirements in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and Federal Statute 42 U.S. Code § 13031(h).

We urge a favorable report on HB820 as a first step.

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<sup>1</sup> *Factors that Influence Child Abuse Reporting: A Survey of Child-Serving Professionals*, Wendy A. Walsh, Lisa M. Jones, Crimes Against Children Research Center, 2015 (31% citing lack of knowledge of signs of abuse; 38% stating their training was inadequate; 41% mistakenly believing they needed physical proof before reporting)

<sup>2</sup> *The Evaluation of Suspected Child Abuse*, *Pediatrics* originally published online April 27, 2015; Cindy W. Christian and COMMITTEE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (citing three recent studies)

<sup>3</sup> BCAC survey of 2372 summer camp counselors (2017)